



2025 Community Agenda

1. Fully Restore Olmsted's Humboldt Parkway and Delaware Park by Removing the Kensington and Scajaquada Expressways

Buffalo Common Council should adopt a resolution supporting restoration of Humboldt Parkway and Delaware Park by fully removing the Kensington and Scajaquada Expressways. In the 20th century, white flight to the suburbs led to government agencies gutting the Humboldt Parkway to build an expressway, devastating surrounding neighborhoods and Black communities on the East Side. Now, the highway's pollution contributes to some of the worst cancer, heart disease, and asthma outcomes in the nation. It promotes disinvestment in the East Side, harming residents and businesses alike. Restoring the Olmsted Park system through expressway removal will lead to an improved economy, higher home values, and increased opportunity for wealth-building in Buffalo. It will reestablish the city's commitment to the environment and to the health and diversity of our population.

Lead partners: East Side Parkways Coalition, Citizens for Regional Transit, Western New York Youth Climate Council

2. Pilot a Community Responder Team in Erie County

New York State should fund a community responder pilot program in Buffalo. Community responders are a new type of first responder for nonviolent, noncriminal health and social needs. A Buffalo pilot team will be neighborhood-based and will respond independently to low-risk calls for behavioral health needs, social disturbances, and quality of life concerns. Team members will include trained health workers and peers equipped with a van stocked with basic food, hygiene, first aid, and comfort supplies. They will de-escalate, problem-solve, provide care on-site, and transport people to longer-term services. Over 100 American cities now send community responders instead of police to eligible calls, and it's time for Buffalo to join them. Community responders can decrease racial disparities in our health and policing systems, and they are widely supported by the public. \$500,000 in NYS funding will pay for a director, team members, equipment, and vehicles to get the first pilot program up and running in 2025.

Lead partners: Erie County Restorative Justice Coalition, Little People's Victory, Buffalo Center for Health Equity, VOICE Buffalo, and Evergreen Health

3. Public Goods for Public Dollars: Pass a Community Benefits Agreement Law for Erie County

Erie County should pass a law requiring a Community Benefits Agreement whenever a development project receives public land or public tax dollars (tax breaks) amounting to \$1,000,000 or more. Developers would be required to negotiate an agreement with a Community Coalition made up of residents impacted by the project, guaranteeing them a seat at the table. The agreement would include benefits related specifically to the development project and its impact. For example, a contract could require things like local hiring, living wage and environmental policy guarantees, services for affected communities, and partnerships with local organizations. Community Benefits Agreements help ensure that public funds given to a developer will have positive effects on local communities. They can be used to promote equity in labor practices and to mitigate the negative effects of gentrification.

Lead partners: Cornell University Industrial Labor Relations (ILR) Buffalo Co-Lab, Partnership for the Public Good, Workers United, WNY Law Center, Open Buffalo, Buffalo Center for Health Equity

4. End Unfair Suspensions in Buffalo Public Schools

The Buffalo Public School Board of Education should adopt the NYS Education Department's current recommendations on student suspensions as district policy. This would eliminate suspensions for Pre-K through 3rd grade, eliminate suspensions longer than 20 school days, and eliminate suspensions for insubordination and other low-level subjective infractions. This would also require the district to provide access to regular schoolwork while children are suspended. Our schools suspend students of color, poor children, non-English speakers, and students with disabilities at disproportionately high rates, and adopting these new policies will immediately begin to address those inequities. These policy changes will decrease the drop-out rate and improve students' health, financial prospects, educational outcomes, and family stability.

Lead partners: Western New York Law Center, NY Civil Liberties Union, Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo

5. Adopt Ranked Choice Voting in the City of Buffalo

The City of Buffalo should adopt a ranked choice voting (RCV) system. Currently, voters in Buffalo can only pick one candidate to vote for in primary and general elections. Sometimes, voters who don't want their vote to be "wasted" will select a candidate based on strategy of who has the best shot of winning, rather than the candidate who aligns most with their values. Instead, RCV allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference, which encourages productive political discourse, and requires candidates to win genuine policy support from voters.

RCV encourages a more diverse range of candidates to run in elections and engages communities of color more fully in the voting process. It is more critical than ever to increase voter participation and genuinely democratic elections.

Lead partners: Partnership for the Public Good, Buffalo Center for Health Equity, League of Women Voters Buffalo Niagara, VOICE Buffalo

6. Pass Good Cause Eviction Protections to Ensure Housing Stability for Buffalo Renters

The City of Buffalo should opt in to Good Cause Eviction protections under New York State law. Good Cause limits evictions to specific grounds for removal (e.g. nonpayment of rent, breaking the lease). It also caps annual rent increases at 5-10%. This allows landlords to keep up with increased costs while preventing them from forcing tenants out with unwarranted rent hikes. Good Cause will help tenants stop unfair evictions, and it will create a more stable, equitable rental market in Buffalo. Good Cause also increases housing security while decreasing the rent burden in communities of color, which are disproportionately affected by evictions. Opting in to this state law will reduce homelessness, improve health outcomes, and strengthen neighborhoods in Buffalo.

Lead partners: PUSH Buffalo and the PUSH Tenant Power Committee, Housing Opportunities Made Equal, Lead 716, Our City Buffalo, Journey's End Refugee Services, Buffalo Democratic Socialists of America

7. Treatment Not Jail: Expand Access to and Modernize Treatment Courts

The NYS legislature should pass the Treatment Not Jail Act (S1976B/A1263B). This law would divert individuals with mental health and substance use issues from the criminal system by expanding their access to—and improving the model of— “treatment” courts throughout NYS. Treatment Not Jails (TNJ) will transform existing drug and mental health courts by connecting participants to evidence-based treatment practices (including harm reduction) and to needed community-based services. Currently, 41% of those in Erie County jails need drug treatment and 59% have mental health needs. Families and neighborhoods are destabilized when these individuals return, untreated, to their communities. Studies have shown that some of the better operating courts largely serve white people, while people of color are generally processed through courts with punitive, abstinence-only philosophies, resulting in far more jail sanctions. TNJ will help address this inequity in the justice system and work toward real restorative justice through treatment.

Lead partners: The Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo, VOICE Buffalo, New York County Defender Services

8. Fully Implement Proactive Rental Inspections (PRI) in the City of Buffalo

The City of Buffalo should fully fund and implement the Proactive Rental Inspection Program. The Common Council unanimously adopted the PRI law in 2020. This law was meant to hold landlords accountable for maintaining safe and healthy rental properties. The legislation requires the Department of Permit & Inspection Services to make regular inspections once every three years of all investor-owned single and double rental units before certifying them for rental. However, in practice, the City conducts very few of these mandatory inspections. This failure affects tens of thousands of residents who live in dangerous and dilapidated housing. Lead paint, water damage, structural hazards, pest infestation, and sewage backups are not uncommon and can lead to health crises and housing insecurity. The Mayor's Office and the Common Council should allocate the necessary resources in the 2025-2026 City budget to fully and urgently implement the program.

Lead partners: Center for Elder Law and Justice, Partnership for the Public Good, PUSH Buffalo, and Housing Opportunities Made Equal.

9. Fulfill the City of Buffalo's Annual Commitment to Fund the Arts

The City of Buffalo should disburse its annually-budgeted funds for arts and cultural organizations and replace the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds promised to—then withdrawn from—frontline arts organizations. There is an established line in the City of Buffalo budget, currently at around \$400,000, intended to fund arts organizations. However, very little of this funding ever makes its way to the arts it is intended to support. This is particularly devastating to smaller organizations operating in and for communities of color. These organizations serve critical economic and community safety purposes in their neighborhoods, so this budget line should be protected and increased. There should be a clear, fair process for awarding this money, and the City should ensure that the awarded funds are promptly paid out to enable financial stability for small arts and cultural organizations.

Lead partners: Arts Services Inc. of Western New York (ASI), Member Organizations of Frontline Arts Buffalo (FAB), Member Organizations of Greater Buffalo Cultural Alliance (GBCA)

10. Pass the Working Families Tax Credit to Help Families Thrive in New York State

New York State should pass the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC). The WFTC combines several credit programs available to state residents: the Empire State Child Credit, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and the dependent exemption, simplifying the process for filing. This bill will lead to more equitable resource distribution by broadening access to tax credits. It raises the age limit for eligible youth and increases the number of children per household covered.

Additionally, it covers immigrant tax filers previously ineligible for credits, meaning that some of New York's poorest families and children will have money for basic needs, like food, housing, and health care.

Lead partners: New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), Children's Agenda, Schuyler Center, United Neighborhood Houses, Ed-Trust NY